

S425

MENTAL SELF-CULTURE.

A

LECTURE,

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BY THE

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TO
THE CHRISTIAN YOUTH
OF MONTREAL,
AND ESPECIALLY THE
SUPERINTENDENTS AND TEACHERS
OF
SABBATH SCHOOLS,

AT WHOSE REQUEST IT WAS DELIVERED,

AND IS NOW PUBLISHED;

This Lecture

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY

THEIR FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

LECTURE, &c.

THE subject to which your attention is this evening to be directed has been announced under the terms—"Mental Culture on Christian Principles." The terms, you observe, are very general, and may well be understood as comprehending a great deal more than it will be in my power even to notice, within the compass of a single lecture. I shall, therefore, be laid under the necessity, by no means painful, of narrowing the sphere of observation and remark, and of confining myself to such views and bearings of my subject, as appear to be most suitable to those, for whose benefit this exercise is more especially intended. I consider myself, then, as addressing those who have nearly or entirely finished—to use a common phrase—their education; but who are justly sensible that however ably and successfully, both on the part of their teachers and themselves, that education may have been conducted, it is very far from being *finished*, if by this phrase it should

be understood that they have nothing more to learn, and that henceforward they may give up the pursuit of mental improvement, by relinquishing the practice of mental application. I cannot suppose there are many, if indeed there be a single individual now present, who can require any thing in the shape, either of argument or illustration, to confute so preposterous a notion.

Again, I take it for granted that the majority of my present hearers, particularly of the young men now present, are, during the greater part of every day—the Sabbath excepted—engaged in some necessary secular employment, and that such have, in consequence, but few hours to spare for the acquisition of knowledge, or the prosecution of any prescribed course of mental cultivation. It would be unreasonable and unjust to expect from them, the same processes and products of mental labour, as may be consistently looked for from those who are exempted from the necessity of engagements, which, whilst they necessarily consume the larger portion of the day, in most instances induce such languor and weariness of mind as well as body, as render the task of mental application peculiarly difficult. I hope to shew you, however, that this difficulty, great as it confessedly is, is often very much and very injuriously exaggerated; and that the proper husbandry of time, and the due selection and

arrangement of your studies, will gradually render such application comparatively easy, and secure a grateful daily retreat from the distracting cares of your worldly avocations.

I only add another preliminary remark, but which, you will at once perceive, is of vast importance, as well on my own account to guard me from misconstruction, as on your account to guard you from misconception. I take it for granted, my friends, that not a few of you have experimentally acquired "that fear of the Lord" which is "the beginning of wisdom"—that "knowledge of the Holy" which "is understanding;" and that there is none here who would not, if personally appealed to on the subject, acknowledge that true religion—consisting in "repentance towards God," "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the fruits of righteousness which are to the praise and glory of God"—is the "one thing needful," without which, all other acquisitions, could you secure them all, would leave you intellectually, morally, spiritually, and therefore perpetually poor indeed. Sorry should I be to see any of you beginning or prosecuting any course of mental improvement, however otherwise commendable, which was not based upon the principle laid down by Solomon, and understood in the scriptural sense of the terms in which it is expressed,—“Wisdom is the

principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding."

There is something unspeakably affecting in the condition—viewed in the light of truth—of a young man or woman eagerly and anxiously enquiring into some branch of human knowledge, or assiduously endeavouring to gain the greatest possible amount of general information on all topics of present interest and utility, but whose mind, as to all religious knowledge, is indifferent, insensible and careless; whose heart has no feelings, no emotions akin to those of her who sat at the feet of Jesus and learnt of him—or of him who, though without a rival in his nation for educational acquirements, could say—"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." This is knowledge which *all may* acquire, for the means of acquirement are open and accessible to all. It is knowledge which *all must* acquire who would entertain any authorized and abiding hope of future happiness. Without such hope, what can or ought to satisfy a mind conscious of present intelligence and coming immortality; and how justly might you condemn the speaker should he not, at the very outset of these observations, beseech you to distinguish between things that differ, betwixt habits and acquisitions which are indeed most desirable and useful, and that great

concern, the salvation of the soul—which involves in its attainment all that the soul itself can enjoy, and, in its loss, all that it can endure !

This much premised, I may now venture, without much risk of misconstruction, to affirm, that the culture of the mind, in the common sense and meaning of these terms, is the duty of the Christian. Were it not so, it would be, as the only other alternative, a matter of *choice* ; and the Christian would be left at liberty to determine, whether the very best and most valuable talent with which he is intrusted, should or should not be improved. The doctrines and discoveries of the word of God teach us a very different lesson ; and something much more simple than the first principles of the oracles of God, would be necessary for his instruction, who should venture to assert that the Christian was accountable for the use of his pecuniary property and his personal influence, but that he owed no account for the employment of his *understanding*. You need not to be cautioned against giving any countenance to an absurdity like this ; and yet, my dear friends, we all need to be reminded of what we are so much disposed practically to overlook,—that due attention to the best means and methods of personal improvement is binding on us—as stewards of God's bounty,—as connected by providence or grace with others, to whom our

faithfulness or unfaithfulness may prove a blessing or a curse,—and as pledged, as in many instances we are by the most sacred of all engagements, to live “not unto ourselves, but unto him who loved us and gave himself for us.” I scruple not, therefore, to assert—and shall purposely put the assertion in the plainest terms—that the very highest degree of mental culture that is consistent with present duty, should be sought for by the Christian. The better informed he is, the better for himself,—for his family,—for his friends,—for the church,—and for the world. The larger his amount of knowledge, and the greater his aptitude in employing and applying it, the more are his personal resources multiplied, and his means of usefulness extended. He is so much the more qualified for fulfilling the objects of his high vocation, for glorifying Christ, and instrumentally promoting the present and eternal welfare of mankind.

The day is past, or rather the *night* is past, when learning was dreaded and denounced as something in itself unhallowed, and almost, if not wholly, incompatible with high spiritual attainments. The more of real learning the Christian possesses, the less likely is he to indulge that vanity and self conceit which, in former times, did much to prejudice the minds of unlearned but devout believers, against pursuits

which seemed, in their tendency, so hostile to the humility, which the gospel of the grace of God at once inculcates and inspires. These good men were not aware that those who vaunted so much their intellectual attainments, were indebted entirely to the ignorance of others, for the toleration given to their childish boastings; that they were, in truth, mere sciologists in literature, and that their self-satisfaction and their contempt of others, were the surest proofs of their having scarcely moved beyond the shores and shallows of the sea of knowledge. Half a century ago, it was the fashion for such men to denounce Christianity as unfriendly to the cultivation and developement of the human faculties; and having ventured on such an assumption, they were not slow to draw the obvious inference, that, as in all other religions, so in this, ignorance was the mother of devotion. It was a gross libel on our holy faith; and yet, some countenance was given to it by the conduct of some good but injudicious men, who represented the *learning* of these opposers of the truth, as unfitting them for its reception. The preventive was their *ignorance*. They knew too little of science and philosophy to be able to appreciate the evidence by which our holy religion is supported:—they took advantage of the ignorance of others, to bolster up their own pretensions to superior acuteness and ability, and

were overjoyed when, by any quibble, they could confound or stagger the simple minded disciple of the Cross. By similar artifices, even in the present day, in the humblest walks of life, there are found those who, having just enough of information to inflate their vanity, and set the deluded multitude a-gazing,—are retailing, at second hand, the wasted and worn-out infidel objections of the eighteenth century. The movement however, comes too late. Learning has renounced the service of infidelity, a service she never yielded, but by constraint and force. She has now become the free and willing handmaid of religion; and now, none can venture, without an obvious dereliction of all principle, and contradiction of a thousand facts, to doubt that the very highest mental cultivation may be combined with the meekness, gentleness, and unfeigned humility, of Christian discipleship,—with that faith which overcomes the world, and that love which is the fulfilling of the law.

We entertain no apprehension then, my young friends, that your mental culture, if properly conducted, will prove injurious to your spiritual interests. I qualify, you will observe, this sentiment; I say this mental culture, if *properly conducted*, cannot be injurious; but must, on the other hand, prove eminently serviceable both to yourselves and others: and I now proceed, there-

fore, with all possible plainness and succinctness, to state, what in my humble judgment, appears essential both as to means, and methods, and motives toward securing such degrees of mental culture, as may by the Divine blessing, furnish much real enjoyment and benefit to yourselves, and fit you for usefully occupying the sphere, in which providence has already placed or may hereafter place you. There are four means of mental self culture, to which I shall successively solicit your attention. The first of these is—

Reading.

And here I take it for granted, that the *Book of God* will ever occupy the *first place* in your attention and esteem. Should it be otherwise, each step you take, in the course of self-improvement, must be taken in a wrong direction. In every plan of study, the enlightened Christian will secure, and set apart, and sacredly devote a portion of each day, to the perusal of the Holy Scriptures. In what order their different parts should be read, is a matter of opinion; and I merely give it as my opinion, that so far as the New Testament is concerned, no advantage is to be gained by departing, in the course of reading, from the present order of its component books; and that, with one or two exceptions, the same

order will be beneficially followed in the perusal of the Old Testament; provided, that in both cases, the *marginal references* be carefully consulted and compared. This latter exercise, if properly engaged in, will require both time and thought; but on what can these be so properly — on what ought they to be so pleasurably expended, as in searching the Scriptures in which we have eternal life?

The *quantity* of the sacred volume which may at any time be read, is no test of advancement in religious knowledge. To understand a *little* is infinitely better than to read much; and the diligent comparison of a single verse, with its kindred and corresponding passages, will rapidly extend your acquaintance with the letter of God's word; whilst the very process will tend greatly to imbue you with its hallowed spirit. However limited then may be the time, which the necessary avocations of life enable you to devote to the exercise of reading, let me most earnestly entreat you to give a due portion of it, to the devout study of the Word of God. It is "the light unto your feet, and the lamp unto your path." It furnishes the food by which the soul is nourished and sustained. It prescribes principles for your practical adoption, and presents examples for your imitation; it is fraught with consolation which you will often need amidst the

cares and anxieties of life, and it opens up prospects, in the contemplation of which, you will learn increasingly to estimate at their proper value, the short-lived vanities of the scene through which you are passing, on your way to immortality. Other books may be advantageous, the Bible is necessary. Others may aid you, but this is essential; and if it could be said of any of you, that whilst aiming at the culture of your minds, you neglected the study of the Word of God, we could not hesitate for a moment, in predicting the fatal issue. "What a man soweth that shall he also reap." The good seed of the word, alone can bear the fruits of immortality—and whatever, apart from this, may be the products of intellectual labour, these cannot, at best, be of any avail to their possessor, beyond the fleeting hours of temporal existence. But, independently of this,—the highest consideration that should prevent the Christian from ever giving a secondary place in his plans of study to the Word of God, and much more from neglecting it;—I am bold to say that no better means could be found to promote what is most generally understood by "mental culture," than the habitual and systematic study of the Word of God. You may occasionally have met with instances of persons, who having been converted in advanced life, have acquired an almost instantaneous enlarge-

ment of understanding and maturity of judgment on general subjects, most strikingly contrasted with their previous ignorance and imbecility. A close familiarity with the Word of God, has been in every such instance the unquestionable means of producing the result.

An examination of the Biography of the church of Christ, and of our own mother country, will show that the most vigorous minds,—minds that have moulded and fashioned other minds, and left to posterity the most mature and mellow fruits of mental culture, acquired their power of commanding, comprehensive, far-reaching and firmly-grasping thought, in the school, not of Pagan classics or philosophers, but of inspired Prophets and Apostles. Here, *Milton's* muse was taught to soar to regions unvisited before, and to sing in strains surpassing far the loftiest and loveliest of Pagan song. Here, *Newton* was morally trained for devoutly tracing the wonders of creation! and *Locke*, for discoursing on the "Conduct of the understanding." Here, with whatever mixture of earthliness their better principles might be alloyed, did the best British patriots of the seventeenth century, learn to distinguish betwixt the rights of Cæsar and of God, and thus to lay a broad foundation for the extending liberties of their country and the world. To their profound acquaintance with the Word

of God, and the assimilation of their minds to the mind of the Spirit, do we owe those gigantic monuments of theological learning, which our Puritan Fathers have bequeathed to us. We could not conceive a better omen for the church of Christ, and for mankind at large, than that the Christian youth of our country, should give themselves to the diligent and persevering study of the Holy Scriptures. In addition to the inestimable spiritual advantages which this would infallibly secure, they would insensibly acquire such accurate and extensive views of truth,—of human nature,—of the Divine government, as all other books combined would fail to furnish. Such an exercise would give a tone of healthfulness and vigour to their sentiments, and render them, in a great degree, independent of the ever precarious judgment of fallible men, as to the right application of religious principle. It would be their most effectual safeguard against such crude, chaotic systems of theological belief, as have been recently promulgated from one of the most ancient English seats of learning, and would equally secure the youthful mind, so easily susceptible of impression from another source, against confounding *faith* with *feeling*, and the liveliness of natural emotion, with the inherent power of enlightened conviction, and calm but firm devotedness to God.

Last, but not least, in the list of advantages to be so certainly derived from the careful study of the Word of God, would be its re-active influence on the *Christian Pulpit*. Christian ministers, bound as they are to "watch for souls, as they that must give account," dare not take too much for granted, as to the acquaintance of their hearers with the Word of God. They know too well that this acquaintance, is in many instances, very superficial and imperfect; and are, therefore, compelled to speak, as to those "who have need of milk, and not of strong meat." They are constrained, by solicitude for the souls of such, to bear, from the more enlightened and advanced, the unmerited imputation of weakness and imbecility, because they act on the conviction, that there are those among their hearers, who "need to be taught what be the first principles of the oracles of God."

But this state of things is much to be lamented. The pastor of a Christian church would gladly leave the first principles of the oracles of God, and "go on unto perfection," if his people would go with him;—and occasionally he may be found far in advance of his flock in the effort to lead them onward; when he is forced to feel, that if he proceeds, he must be contented with very few companions, and that the approbation and spiritual benefit of these, must be purchased at the

fearful expense of impoverishing the souls of others.

There is no remedy for this great evil, but in the more general study of the Word of God. This will soon act as a mighty *lever* on the ministrations of the pulpit. The ministers of Christ will feel emboldened to proclaim the whole counsel of God. They will be able to address their hearers generally, without flattery—in other circumstances most criminal and destructive—in the language of Paul, “We speak as unto wise men, judge ye what we say.” They will be relieved from the painful conviction, that many take for granted whatever they may choose to affirm or deny; and will have the high satisfaction of knowing, that their hearers are inclined and qualified to “search the Scriptures daily,” so that their faith may not stand in the “wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

Be it your’s my young friends, to realize these most reasonable expectations. Resolve to become “mighty in the Scriptures.” “Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you in all wisdom.” Let your memories be richly stored with the letter of divine truth. Let your judgment be daily exercised in “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Let your affections be daily stimulated and revived, by the contemplation of what is heavenly and divine. You will thus become

“wise unto salvation ;”—and in addition to this, you will be undergoing a mental and moral training, which will render every other attainment easy in itself, and useful in its application. A foundation will thus be laid for a fair and lasting superstructure of valuable and advantageous acquirements ; and, whilst thus intellectually and morally fitted for the prosecution of any course of study to which duty or interest may prompt you, you will be led, as by intuition, by the unreasoning readiness of holy principle and feeling, to consecrate all your acquirements to the service of your Saviour, and to regard them as mainly valuable, because they furnish the means of proving how sincerely, and how ardently, you desire to honour him. Such fruits of mental culture He will not refuse to accept at the hands of his disciples. Such gifts, thus sanctified by the Word of God, will be graciously acknowledged ; and, whatever be the course of self-improvement you may be induced to follow, you will have the unspeakable satisfaction of knowing that the light of God’s countenance shines upon your path, that you are proceeding under the influence and direction of principles he has himself indicated, and precepts he has himself enjoined ; and having thus his word for your rule, and his glory for your end, you may, with unwavering and unhesitating confidence, expect his blessing.

Long as I have dwelt on the subject of Biblical study, I must not overlook the importance of your always having, in addition to the Holy Scriptures, *some standard religious work* beside you, for regular and systematic reading. I would seriously and earnestly dissuade you from having at any time, more than one such work in hand. Your minister will of all others, be your best guide as to your choice of such books, and the order in which they should be read; and having obtained his advice, you should conscientiously follow it. It may be difficult, at first, to resist and overcome that habit of desultory religious reading, which may have unhappily been formed, but perseverance will induce the opposite habit, and a very brief experience will convince you that it is incomparably the better of the two.

I am unwilling to say any thing in reference to the periodical religious literature of the day, that might seem to detract from its general excellence and utility; but faithfulness on the present occasion, compels me to confess, that much time is often spent on Religious Magazines, that would be far more profitably devoted to the perusal of some work of established reputation. It is seldom that a writer in a magazine can satisfactorily discuss any branch of religious truth, in the brief compass of a single Essay; and a series of Essays running through a correspond-

ing succession of months, must, in the nature of things, fail of bringing the whole subject clearly and fully before the reader's mind. If it be a subject in which he is interested, let him ask for some able volume, in which it is discussed ; and let him give this the decided preference to those broken and dispersed fragments, which must generally fail of giving satisfaction to an intelligent enquirer. Few, besides, take up a Religious Magazine without at least cursorily perusing all that it contains ; and it may contain many things, of which ignorance would be no real loss, and on some of which better and fuller information might be obtained elsewhere, without the risk of sacrificing much valuable time, and inducing much mental dissipation, by turning over the leaves, and glancing over the pages of a heterogeneous collection. You will find intervals sufficiently long and numerous, in the course of every month, to glean all that is interesting or valuable in such publications, and without ever allowing them to interfere with your stated and consecrated hours of self-improvement.

On these valuable seasons, the reading of *Newspapers* ought never, for a moment, to encroach. Whatever is important in their contents can be ascertained by a very cursory inspection ; and when you have made yourself acquainted with the leading topics of public interest or utility,

I trust you will have sufficient moral courage, to lay the paper aside, and have recourse to something more instructive, and, to a Christian mind, far more interesting than the ever recurring accounts of accident and crime which they invariably contain.

As time is so essential to mental culture, and so large a portion of your time is necessarily consumed by the duties of your worldly calling, you will not, I am sure, deem any remark impertinent, that bears on the proper economy of your remaining hours. You will, at once, acquit me of any design or desire to underrate the importance of the daily, weekly, or monthly productions of the press, whilst I thus earnestly recommend you to exclude them all from *that portion* of each returning day, which you are able and inclined to devote to the work of mental culture. Some resolution will be required here;—but the force of Christian principle, and the sense of Christian responsibility, and the desire of Christian usefulness, will supply the requisite incentive; and you will not long pursue a course requiring at the outset some measure of self-denial, without realizing an amount of pleasure and of profit, which will far more than compensate for the effort.

I go on to observe that,—next to some standard theological work which you should always

have beside you until its information is exhausted, and it is systematically succeeded by another,—you should regularly read, in a similar order of succession, those standard works which bear directly on your present or anticipated *profession*. If engaged in general mercantile pursuits, you will readily find books to guide you in your study of the principles and laws of trade and commerce; and if you belong to what is strictly and technically called a *profession*, you will feel the importance of reading attentively and carefully, what has been written by acknowledged leaders in that line of business. It is discreditable to the gospel, and greatly detrimental to the interests of true religion, when its professors are disqualified, either by ignorance or inattention, for the duties of the station in which the providence of God has placed them; nor can any thing be more inconsistent with truth and justice, than to place such ignorance and inattention, to the account of true religion. True religion, which is ever a matter of conviction and of conscience, will not suffer its professor to trifle with the sacred obligations under which he lies, to adorn *in all things*, the doctrine of Jesus Christ, to be “diligent in business, serving the Lord,” and “whatever he does, to do all to the glory of God.”

It is a religious duty for the Christian to aim

at excellence in all things. It is his shame, if he willingly suffers another, from the mere impulse of worldly interest and honour, to take more pains to master his profession, and secure proficiency in all its details, than *he* does, whose conscience is professedly under the influence of religious truth, and who avowedly regards the glory of God, as involved in his consistency. No credit ought ever to be given to those, who would justify their negligence in the acquirement of professional knowledge, or in the practical details of professional business, by dwelling on the insignificance of such matters, as compared with higher and enduring interests. In a few instances, this is probably the effect of mental weakness; in most instances, it is a mere pretext,—an opiate administered to an uneasy conscience, a sinister effort at self-exculpation from what is, nevertheless, felt to be grossly criminal. Have we a single instance of such remissness in secular affairs, in the word of God? in the Old Testament, or in the New? Can a solitary scriptural example of piety be adduced, in combination with indolence, and sloth, and supine indifference to the duties of any worldly avocation?

I trust it will be your earnest desire and endeavour, to qualify yourself for the creditable occupation of the sphere, in which you may be appointed providentially to move. Resolve to

emulate the bright example of that Hebrew youth whose bitterest enemies, though he had the command of one hundred and twenty provinces, could "find nothing against him, except concerning the law of his God." Prove to the conviction of all around you, that though freed by the grace of God from the feverish thirst of worldly gain, you are too much concerned for the honour of the gospel, to neglect the means of "providing for things honest in the sight of all men," and that you have come to the actual business of life, with a mind fully competent to undertake and prosecute it, and are in no respect inferior, as to information and acquired ability, to those who practically discard the controlling power of holy principle and feeling. I cannot believe that such a mind can be long in contact with others, without making them conscious of its presence. There will be extorted from the lips, even of the ungodly, the unwilling concession, that the force of Christian principle, and the fervour of spiritual affections, do not unfit their possessor for the honourable and exemplary discharge of secular and civil obligation. The world will be disabused of a prejudice against spiritual religion, on the ground of its alleged hostility to the demands of domestic and social duty; and on you will devolve the distinguished honour of putting beyond all doubt, the possibility of ably and suc-

cessfully prosecuting your respective branches of worldly business, without betraying that ignorance of your business, which, in every instance, is dishonourable; and without any of those compromises, which, however winked at and palliated by nominal professors, are criminal in the sight of God, afflictive to the truly pious, and furnish the ready-made apology to the frivolous and profane, for disregarding principles, which fail to bind the consciences of those, who seem most tenaciously to hold them.

Next to your *religious* and *professional studies*, I would place those which relate to that particular walk of *Christian usefulness*, which, at the bidding of an enlightened and sanctified benevolence, you have deliberately chosen. I take it for granted that you have made such a choice, and that you entertain too just conceptions of Christian duty and of Christian privilege, to be able or inclined to "look on your own things" without "looking on the things of others." I frankly confess, that taking the New Testament as the standard of judgment, I cannot help looking with suspicion on the personal piety, especially of the youthful professor, who is not in some way, however humble, endeavouring to do good to others.

Many, however, have been the partial, and even complete failures of the truly benevolent;

arising from the want of mental culture, *with an especial view* to their chosen or allotted province; and I cannot help thinking that the practical observance of a few important principles, would inconceivably augment the energy and efficiency, of all that in the form of Christian agency is now at work amongst us. It were easy to point, were it at all proper, to individual instances in which these principles have been most fully exemplified, and in which the result has invariably been a proportionably increased amount of practical efficiency. It may be sufficient, just to look at such principles, in their relation to one department of benevolent exertion with which many of you are abundantly and happily familiar, that namely of *Sabbath School Instruction*.

It is easy to conceive of two individuals, with equal purity of motive, and an equally ardent desire to do good, engaging, from week to week, in this important exercise. The one, however, does not conceive that any thing in the shape of personal preparation is requisite towards communicating, through the medium of question-books, hymn-books, and easy passages of scripture, the elements of religious truth to the minds of the children committed to his care. Accordingly, he meets his class, and spends the allotted hour in hearing their recitations, or in repeating,

himself, some portions of holy writ, and endeavouring to impress them with a just sense of its meaning and importance. But his utmost efforts fail to secure the fixed attention of the children. The vacant stare, the restless movement, the languor and listlessness of his youthful charge distress and grieve him: no sensible advance is made by them in religious knowledge,—and although principle and conscience will not permit him to resign his office, the duties of it become, by their obvious unproductiveness, increasingly irksome and distasteful.

Let us mark the different course adopted by his colleague. *He* sets out on the principle, as applicable to the spiritual husbandry as to the natural, that the *seed*, to be productive, must be *suited to the soil*. He studies the laws of mind. He reads attentively the most approved works on general and religious education within his reach. He commits to writing, the results of his reading and observation. On the eve of each returning Sabbath, he endeavours to make himself thoroughly master of the subject, which he is to bring before the children; carefully collects such similes and figures, as may tend most clearly to illustrate, or most powerfully to enforce it,—mentally surveys the different characters, circumstances, abilities, and relative advancement, of his pupils,—and prepares as far as possible,

for each of them, his due proportion of spiritual provision. He is especially anxious to guard against all *hard words* and such *complex forms of speech*, as will prevent the children from understanding, or wishing to understand his meaning. Thus thoroughly furnished for his work, he proceeds to the place of convocation ;—and as from Sabbath to Sabbath he prosecutes his sacred work, his beloved pupils hang with delight upon his lips. They “hear him gladly,” because he speaks to their understandings, interests their feelings, and employs words and phrases which they know, and demonstrates, in a manner which even a little child can discover and appreciate, that he “*studies* to show himself approved unto God,—a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.”

Any other department of Christian usefulness admits of, and demands the practical application of the same general principle. There must be mental preparation, and this, in kind and degree, must be suited to the objects at which the Christian aims, and the talents of which he is possessed. The greatest benefactors of their species have been such—not only by yielding to the impulses of self-denying generosity, and practically pursuing with steadiness and simplicity of principle and motive, the end at which they aim ; but by deliberate fore-thought, by careful

observation, by reading the published records of the labours and successes and failures of those who have preceded them in the same walks of usefulness ;—thus bringing the results of former experience, the experience of others as well as their own, to supply what may be defective, or correct what is wrong, or give a fresh impulse to what is right, in their own plans and methods of procedure. Can it be doubted that the adoption of the simple principle, that nothing in the form of Christian beneficence can be well performed without suitable mental preparation, or in other words, corresponding mental culture, would render the moral resources of Christians, and of the church of Christ, a thousand times more extensive and efficient than they ever yet have been. My young friends, you are in circumstances which enable you to verify this representation. Let me exhort you, first of all, to choose deliberately and prayerfully, that department of benevolent exertion which seems on the whole, best suited to your circumstances, your talents, and your taste. This done, resolve to read with equal deliberation and prayerfulness, whatever, in the shape of argument or fact, may assist you in the choice of measures and of means, and I am much mistaken, if such a process does not speedily bring an abundant and satisfactory reward. You will have your reward in your

conscious freedom from those irksome perplexities, which would otherwise beset your path. You will escape those morbid fears and apprehensions which paralyze the moral power, and enervate the moral courage of many a Christian philanthropist. In one word, you will thus acquire an enlightened firmness and fixedness of purpose, which will bend all circumstances to its own design, and bring your benevolent desires and efforts to a successful and triumphant issue.

Our hopes of the prevalence of scriptural views on all subjects connected with the constitution of the church, and the diffusion of the gospel, depend, in a great measure, on your devout attention to these subjects; and any course of mental culture which you may adopt, will be decidedly defective, that will not enable you to give forth, whenever required, a prompt and well-principled decision, on the great religious questions of the age.

I must now draw this, by far the largest division of my subject, to a close, by observing, that if after giving all due attention to Biblical, theological, professional, and philanthropic studies, you still can spare some time, it may be very usefully occupied in the perusal of other works, which do not come under any of these heads.

The history of your mother country and of

the colony will claim your attention, and you will endeavour to make yourself generally conversant with the leading events, and the characters and conduct of the truly great men of each successive age.

Our language, though not pre-eminently abounding in morally unobjectionable *poetry*, contains works with which no youthful reader ought to be unacquainted: and piety may be fed, as well as taste elevated and refined, by the classic page of Milton,—the chaste and mellow strains of the amiable Cowper,—the elegant and vivid compositions of the devout Montgomery,—and the hallowed simplicity, and beauty, and pathos, of “The Course of Time.”

In the department of *Biography* our age is abundantly prolific, and, as in other departments, so in this, *selection* is imperatively demanded. Of *Religious* biographies, we have now a rich variety, and some of them are models of good writing, as well as precious memorials of departed excellence. On the whole, I think that the choice and succession of such works will be beneficially left to the direction of some judicious friend.

Of *Novels* and *Romances*, and such-like works, little needs be said to those for whom these remarks are especially designed. Should you comply with these imperfect, though affec-

tionate counsels, you will not only have no *time*, you will have no *taste*, for a class of books which pamper the fancy while they starve the understanding, substitute passion for principle, give a false colouring to fact, clothe vice with the stolen ornaments of virtue, unfit the mind for calm enquiry and sober contemplation, and are felt to be unfit companions for those who are studying to "walk so as to please God." Nothing can be more preposterous in principle, and more incompatible with fact, than that novel reading can in any degree contribute to the culture of the mind;—an idea which comes under the same category with the once vaunted aphorism of the profligate and vicious, that "the theatre is the school of virtue."

Next to *Reading*, as a means of Mental Culture, is—

Reflection.

I have already incidentally noticed the importance of thoughtfulness, in reference to the perusal of the books which may come successively before you. The mere *mechanical act* of reading cannot, in any case, secure aught of real or lasting benefit; and there is scarcely more than mechanism in the manner in which works of standard value and acknowledged usefulness, are

oftentimes perused. Page after page passes in review before the eye, chapter after chapter is dismissed, and at length the volume is closed, with the conviction and the declaration that it is "a good book." But if it be *a good book*, this is not the way to read it; and the design of the author has not been accomplished, by such a hasty disposal of his recorded thoughts. These are intended to enlighten, inform, impress, and stimulate the mind. They are intended not only to meet the eye, under the visible aspect of words and sentences,—but, through these, to meet the understanding in the substantial form of principle, and sentiment, and reasoning, and fact. It is far from being sufficient to understand the meaning of the writer;—our duty is to judge of its correctness, to compare it with the result of previous inquiry, to bring it to the test of truth, and to determine the measure of confidence and credit to be given to its reasonings and its representations. You will, of course, understand this remark as having no reference whatever to the Word of God. *Here*, we are to be simply *enquirers*. Infinite wisdom cannot err:—and the information and instruction conveyed by the pen of Inspiration is ever to be received with the reverence due from fallible and finite creatures, to the sure sayings of the Only Wise God. Even in regard to Biblical

knowledge however, no definite and satisfactory and useful attainments can be made, without reflection. The Bible, in form as in substance, is adapted to the constitution of the human mind, and requires continually the exercise of one or other, and sometimes of all its faculties. If *principles* are here inculcated, it is that these may take hold of the understanding, the conscience, and the heart, and so mould the character, and regulate the conduct. If *precepts* are enjoined, it is that they may, by thoughtful and mature consideration, secure the practical avoidance of forbidden evils, and the cheerful performance of commanded duties. If *facts* are here recorded, it is that they may be treasured up in the memory, as furnishing such illustrations of truth or error,—of excellence or evil, as may aid the judgment in any case of practical difficulty, and, by the force of example, deter from what is wrong, and constrain to what is right.

None of these important objects can be secured without reflection :—and without this, therefore, the Word of God, though intrinsically and relatively “more precious than gold, yea than much fine gold,” will be practically useless. Alas ! in how many instances is it really so ! How often is it lamentably obvious, that the truths of the Bible, though known, acknowledged, and

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even verbally revered, engage so little thought, and exert such a limited influence, as scarcely to distinguish its professed admirer from what he would have been had his eye never rested on the Sacred Page.

It was the advice of Paul to Timothy to "meditate on these things:"—and although the advice may have a special bearing on the needful preparation for *Ministerial* labour; yet it clearly implies this principle, that fixed, continuous, and calm reflection are necessary to an accurate, extended, and influential acquaintance with the Word of God.

As to all *uninspired* works we may carry our enquiries much further than the mere meaning of the authors; and it will be a wholesome exercise, an exercise that will tend greatly to strengthen the mental faculties, as well as to store the memory with "the materials with which wisdom builds,"—to pause at intervals, in the process of reading, to recal the course, and retrace the current of the author's thoughts,—to mark as you go along, what seems inconclusive in argument and objectionable in statement, or what, on the contrary, is worthy of special notice,—and, after you have finished the volume, to *record in writing*, in a book kept for this special purpose, your general opinion of the whole performance, with the grounds on which the opinion rests.

To such a written record of opinion, I attach very great importance, and will just state, without attempting to illustrate, a few of its advantages. It will secure a fixedness of attention in the perusal of any volume, since without this you would be consciously unqualified to pronounce upon its merits. By recording your judgment of its merits, with the reasons you assign for it, you will bring all the leading topics of the volume deliberately under your review, thereby fixing the whole more firmly in your memory, and deepening proportionably the impression it has made. This record will furnish the best index, not only to your course of reading, but to your advancement in the different branches of study, as also in your powers of discrimination and description. You may, after the lapse of months or years, find reason to *change* many of your opinions, as to the intrinsic worth or relative value of different books:—and the record of these altered views, as compared with the former, will furnish you with a valuable opportunity of disciplining your own mind into the willing toleration of those views of others, which may still differ from your own. Such a record, you will observe, differs from what is generally understood by a *religious journal*:—and yet there are religious journals, and of the very best kind, which contain the writers' views of books, as well as

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their reflections on their own spiritual condition and the various striking events and occurrences of life. I might instance the memoirs of Urquhart, Durant, Henry Martyn; and, in *Female* religious biography, of Mrs. Huntington, as fine specimens of the class to which I refer, and as illustrating the possible combination of what may be called an intellectual, with a spiritual narrative of life's origin and rise and progress and decline. As to religious journals generally, I am inclined to think, that if made to contain a narrative of *fact* as well as *feeling*, and carefully preserved from the inspection of others, they may be greatly beneficial; and when written under the influence of "Godly fear," and the solemn consciousness of responsibility for the use of time and talent and opportunity, may serve to induce humility,—to excite gratitude,—to stimulate to exertion,—and to sustain the spirit of devotedness to God.

Although I mention—

Conversation

as a third means of Mental Culture, my time will not allow me to do even the semblance of justice, to a subject so important. The great end to which Conversation ought to be directed, is unquestionably the mutual improvement of

the parties ;—and it is equally unquestionable, that if that improvement be not secured, mutual injury must be the result of intercourse. Were it nothing more in this latter case, but the loss of time, and the distraction and dissipation of the mind—this would be injury enough ; but they who judge of actions and omissions, of thoughts and words, in their relation to the character, condition, and everlasting destiny of man, will not and cannot think lightly of successive hours spent, it may be repeatedly, perhaps *habitually*, in thoughtless and frivolous remarks on the incidents of the day—the puerilities of fashion—the little occurrences of domestic life—the state, as it may happen, of the *nation*, the *market*, or the *weather*. If these be the products of companionship—the fruits of social intercourse,—better far that such intercourse were entirely suspended : for what but spiritual and moral injury, can follow such a waste of time ?—of time which might be so much more worthily, and withal, so much more profitably devoted to one of those useful companions which every library can furnish, or to some word or deed of Christian benevolence, which may cheer the sad spirit of an afflicted fellow creature, and direct some poor wanderer, in the way to heaven.

Mutual intercourse there must be ; but this intercourse may be turned to good account. If

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you lay it down as a maxim, and endeavour devoutly to act upon it,—either to derive *from* others, or communicate *to* others some useful knowledge, you will,—in either case, directly promote your own mental benefit. You will not be anxious to cultivate the frequent companionship of those amongst your seniors who have neither inclination nor ability to aid your progress in knowledge and in Christian virtue: but if you have access to the society of individuals whom you know to be wise, and holy, and devoted men, you will,—if duly concerned for your mental culture,—systematically prefer their society to that of others your juniors, it may be, in years, and perhaps your inferiors in station, amongst whom, though you should appear to much advantage, you are not likely to attain any solid benefit. “He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise.” If you must have intercourse, seek such for your companions, as are able to instruct, direct,—

“—reprove each dull delay,
“Allure to brighter worlds, and lead the way.”

I must pass over much that might be said on the subject of conversation, as auxiliary to Mental Culture,—in order to add to these already too extended observations, a very few remarks on the exercise of—

Prayer,

viewed in relation to the same important subject — the Culture of the Mind.

My first remark here, has reference to a practical error which, to be avoided, must be distinctly mentioned. It is that of supposing, or acting as though it were supposed, that there is any thing affecting the intellectual or spiritual improvement of the Christian, which may not be made the subject of prayer to God. There can be no doubt, indeed, on any enlightened mind, as to the importance of this exercise in connection with the study of the *Holy Scriptures*. There is a felt appropriateness in the act of imploring divine direction and assistance in the sincere attempt to understand the Word, and to learn the will of God;—and spiritually barren must that mind ever remain—even though the seed of the Word be plentifully scattered on its surface—on which the dews of heavenly influence do not descend to fertilize the soil.

But may not, *ought not* prayer, to precede, accompany, and follow the perusal of other books besides the Bible? This would be a startling proposal to some readers; but I am now speaking, remember, of those classes of books which have been already recommended to your use:—and why should not the guidance and benediction

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of our Heavenly Father be solicited in reference to these? You ask—you would tremble not to ask—his blessing, on the material food that nourishes your mortal body, why should you not ask his blessing on the intellectual food that nourishes the mind?—We can very easily account for the revulsion of feeling produced by a proposal to implore the divine blessing on what is known to be, however disguised, nothing better than moral poison;—but in proceeding to the perusal of some work of known excellence and utility, what more reasonable, more suitable, than to lift up the heart, in earnest prayer, that what you are about to read, may subserve your personal benefit—that every fresh accession of knowledge from such sources may elevate, expand, and quicken into useful activity, your mental faculties and powers—and that God may be glorified by the cheerful consecration of every fresh attainment to his service?

Still it may be said that these remarks, however applicable to works of a *theological* character and a religious tendency, scarcely admit of application to those other classes of works which have been noticed. Again, I may ask, why not? If it be, in any case, important to know the will of God in reference to our temporal affairs, and to entreat his blessing in the prosecution of our lawful business, can it be

wrong, nay, is it not most obviously consistent with right reason, to ask that he would enable us to distinguish truth from error in any human production we may desire to peruse—and enable us, from the materials thus providentially placed within our reach, to form a correct judgment of the course we should pursue ?

In the perusal of any volume that bears on the particular walk of Christian usefulness, which we have chosen, there is a most obvious propriety in such an exercise,—and every Christian must feel it to be an exalted privilege, to look up to Him from whom cometh that “wisdom which is profitable to direct ;” and beseech him to be our supreme, controlling counsellor and guide. Nor can I discover any thing that does not most completely harmonize with Christian duty and Christian feeling, in the habit of converting the impressions produced and the emotions awakened, by the annals of history—the records of biography—and the strains of sacred poetry, into the utterances, or, by all but God, unheard ejaculations of fervent and effectual prayer.

I must not detain you by an extended application of the same principle, to the other means of mental culture, namely, solitary reflection, and social conversation. The application can easily be made ; and if with these as well as with every branch of religious, professional, benevolent

and general study, the spirit of humble and earnest prayer be systematically and habitually combined,—who can doubt that the culture of the mind may be rapidly and surely promoted. Every favourable influence is thus secured. The showers of heavenly blessing descend upon the mind. The seeds of truth and righteousness imbedded there, become instinct with vegetative virtue, and the soil once barren—or covered only with thorns and briers, now blooms with the verdure of useful vegetation, or bears upon its bosom the ripe fruits of an abundant harvest.

May such, my dear young friends, be the result of your endeavours to secure the culture of your minds ;—and, that it may be so, may you ever be enabled and inclined to repair to the source and fountain-head of all wisdom and knowledge ! In every path of business and benevolence, may you walk with God ; and may you ever be disposed to bring your acquirements, whatever they be in degree or kind, and offer them to Him to be sanctified by his grace, and made subservient to his glory !
